



Food Wastage Issue

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This article is based on **“India has a food wastage problem. Here’s how individuals can make a difference”** which was published in The Indian Express on 07/04/2021. It talks about the food wastage issue in India.

Despite adequate food production, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has reported that about 190 million Indians remain undernourished. Moreover, it states that every third malnourished child is Indian.

Ironically, the same report highlights that around 40% of the food produced in India is either lost or wasted. It is further estimated that the value of food wastage in India is around ₹92,000 crores per annum.

This food wastage, however, isn’t limited to one level alone but perforates through every stage; from harvesting, processing, packaging, and transporting to the end stage of consumption.

Though food wastage is a global problem, India stands a chance to convert this into an opportunity, if it can address it properly.

Case Study: SAFAL Outlet

- On average, 18.7 kgs of food was disposed off by one Safal outlet daily.
- This suggests that an estimated 7.5 tonnes of food are discarded daily across the 400 Safal outlets in Delhi.
- Approximately 84.7% of the total food waste recorded was thrown in the bin, while the rest was either fed to the poor or some animals.
- A significant portion of the food waste bin was still in edible condition.
- If the edible food waste generated by Safal is diverted, an estimated 2000 people could be fed daily.

Challenge of Food Wastage

- **Pre-Consumption Losses:** Nearly 40% of the food produced in India is wasted every year due to fragmented food systems and inefficient supply chains.
This is the loss that occurs even before the food reaches the consumer.
- **Food Wastage At Households:** There is also a significant amount of food waste generated in our homes. As per the Food Waste Index Report 2021, a staggering 50 kg of food is thrown away per person every year in Indian homes.
- **Greenhouse Gases Emission:** This excess food waste usually ends up in landfills, creating potent greenhouse gases which have dire environmental implications.
- **Impact of The Pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic not only exposed the problems of food waste but also compounded them.
 - In the wake of the lockdown imposed last year, surplus stocks of grain — pegged at 65 lakh tonnes in the first four months of 2020 — continued to rot in godowns across India.
 - Access to food became extremely scarce for the poor, especially daily-wage laborers.
- **Supply-Chain Management Issues:** Some problems in the Indian food supply chain include inefficiency of government programs, lack of transparency in revenue generation, insufficient storage facilities, and lack of comprehensive and accurate inventories.

Way Forward

- **Behavioral Change:** According to various reports food waste attributed to households and their irresponsible consumption patterns means that change needs to begin in our own homes.
Calculated purchasing when buying groceries, minimizing single-use packaging wherever possible, ordering consciously from restaurants, and reconsidering extravagant buffet spreads at weddings can go a long way.
- **Food Bank Concept:** Edible food should be made available every day, for free, at the latest in the last opening hour, so it can be picked up and consumed by those in need.
 - The option of distribution through food banks can also be explored, as can tie-ups with private actors so that food can reach hunger hotspots.
 - At the community level, one can identify and get involved with organizations such as Coimbatore-based No Food Waste which aims to redistribute excess food to feed the needy and hungry.
- **International Precedents:** We can look to best practices and laws in countries like France, Norway, Denmark, UK, etc., in order to check spoilage and destruction of edible food waste in India.
For example, in France, supermarkets prioritize the reduction, reuse, and recycling of extra food.

- **Technological Investment:** It is important that technology is adopted at every stage of the supply chain to overcome this problem.
 - Planning in the supply chain can improve with technology, reducing transit time in shipping and logistics. In addition, multiple government initiatives are also assisting in building infrastructure for the food industry.
 - Investments in the vibrant start-up ecosystem in India can also aid in addressing all the hindrances in the system with the support of the latest logistics and supply chain technologies, blockchain, artificial intelligence, data monitoring, storage, and packaging solutions

Conclusion

Early awareness about our duty to minimize food waste is critical in changing the way our society addresses hunger and food scarcity. Thus everyone must join hands if we are to work towards a truly sustainable India that does not have millions undernourished despite having adequate food production.

Drishti Mains Question

Though food wastage is a global problem, India stands a chance to convert this into an opportunity, if it can address it properly. Comment.
